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3 NATIONS JOINING TO HUNT MENGELE

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

The United States, West Germany and Israel announced yesterday a coordinated effort to track down and prosecute Josef Mengele, the elusive Nazi death-camp doctor.

After two days of meetings in Frankfurt, the Justice Department said, law enforcement officials of the three countries "resolved to open direct lines of communication at the prosecutorial and investigative levels" with the goal of bringing Dr. Mengele to trial for "crimes against humanity."

West German arrest papers charge him with selecting victims for gassing and medical experiments at the Auschwitz death camp.

Resurfaced and Disappeared

The agreement, the most ambitious international effort since World War II to hunt down a former Nazi, comes 40 years after Dr. Mengele shed his SS uniform and boldly resettled in his hometown in the American sector of Germany. Later he disappeared, to resurface in South America under his own name, selling the Mengele family's line of farm machinery, before going underground again.

The new international cooperation follows years of little official interest and only fitful moves to find Dr. Mengele, now regarded as the world's most wanted fugitive, with a price of nearly \$4 million on his head.

Although Israel asked Interpol this week to join the search for Dr. Mengele, the multinational police agency has generally steered clear of Nazi cases. Officials could recall no previous case in which the three Governments pledged such close cooperation in searching for a Nazi war criminal.

Why the case, after lying dormant for so many years, should now assume such extraordinary proportions is unclear, but some officials say it has to do with the 40th anniversary of Germany's defeat and a long-delayed coming to grips with issues of the Holocaust.

Taking part in the meetings in Frankfurt this week were officials of the Marshal's Service and Office of Special Investigations of the Justice Department, the West German federal and state criminal police and the Israeli Ministry of Justice and the police.

The Justice Department said that because of the sensitivity of the investigation, no further details could be provided. But investigators and other experts interviewed in recent months said they believed that Dr. Mengele was still alive at age 74 and hiding in

his longtime refuge of Paraguay, making occasional visits to neighboring countries and possibly some trips overseas.

The Paraguayan leader, Gen. Alfredo Stroessner, in a highly unusual television interview, recently denied knowing Dr. Mengele and told ABC News, "I don't know where he is, and we cannot find out where he is."

But accounts from admitted Mengele associates obtained by a New York lawyer place the former SS physician in Paraguay as recently as 1982 — three years after the Paraguayan Government, under growing pressure, revoked Dr. Mengele's citizenship on the ground that he had been out of the country for at least five years.

Inquiries by The New York Times and interviews with those who conducted investigations have also brought out these disclosures:

¶ For about four years after fleeing Auschwitz, Dr. Mengele lived, by all accounts openly, in or around his hometown of Günzburg in Bavaria, a company town of the giant Mengele family farm-machinery factory. Günzburg was in the American occupation zone but the American authorities apparently never checked for his presence.

¶ At some point, Dr. Mengele may have been taken into custody by American forces, according to ambiguous notations in Army records and recollections by former American soldiers.

¶ In 1956 in Argentina, Dr. Mengele felt secure enough to abandon a long-time alias and resurface under his own name, under which he secured citizenship in Paraguay.

¶ In Paraguay in the 1960's, officials of the Stroessner Government tipped Dr. Mengele that Israeli agents were looking for him.

¶ While in Paraguay, Dr. Mengele traveled to German communities selling farm equipment and kept in touch with a Mengele company officer in Günzburg.

Israel Did Not Press

After Paraguay joined the United Nations Security Council in 1968, Israel took pains not to antagonize the Stroessner Government and did not press the Mengele case, according to Benno Weiser Varon, who was the Israeli Ambassador to Paraguay in 1968.

The worldwide interest in the Mengele case has produced a flood of misinformation and possibly deliberate disinformation that has clouded the search with bogus sightings and photographs — including, apparently, the pictures on widely circulated wanted posters.

"It's the third largest industry in Paraguay, information on Josef Mengele," said Allan A. Ryan Jr., former head of the Justice Department's special investigations unit for war-crimes cases.

The following account is based on Nazi records and postwar German

documents, statements by members of the Mengele family, company officials and Auschwitz survivors, and interviews with investigators and private researchers.

Family Was Wealthy

Josef Mengele was born in Günzburg on March 16, 1911, the year his father, Karl, bought a farm-machinery company that became the source of the family's substantial wealth. He had an older brother, Karl Jr., and a younger brother, Alois.

In 1933, the year of Hitler's rise to power, Josef Mengele joined the S.A., the extremist Nazi militia that was purged the following year. In 1937, as a young doctor, he joined the Nazi Party, and he married in 1939. After research at an institute for "racial purity" in Frankfurt, he joined military units, serving in the general SS and the Waffen SS on the Russian front. After reaching the rank of major in the medical corps, he was assigned to duty at Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland in May 1943.

He was not the chief doctor at Auschwitz, the Germans' largest death camp, where an estimated 4 million people, most of them Jews, were gassed and cremated.

But accounts of survivors — many of whom recall his hypnotic dark eyes and the distinctive triangular-shaped gap between his front teeth — place him constantly at the arrival ramp selecting those to be killed immediately and those to be put to work or to be used as guinea pigs for medical experiments. His obsession was twins and, the charges say, he killed and dissected many twin children in hopes of finding the secret to more quickly producing a "master race" of blue-eyed Aryans.

One of the counts later filed by the West Germans charges: "At the end of 1944, he supposedly conducted experiments on a newborn baby of witness J., after which the eyes were not recognizable any more, but just formed a single red clump." The baby later died.

Strange Farewell Recalled

By the time the Red Army liberated Auschwitz on Jan. 27, 1945, Dr. Mengele had disappeared. A survivor, Marc Berkowitz, recalls the doctor bidding him a strangely sentimental farewell at Christmas of 1944.

The doctor's movements over the next several months have not been traced, but Justice Department investigators are studying Army records suggesting that he may have been apprehended by American troops, a recollection shared by several former soldiers. If he was arrested, he may have escaped or been released, because the summer of 1945 found Dr. Mengele back in Günzburg.

Gerald Posner, a New York lawyer who has documented much of Dr. Mengele's life on the run for a book he is writing, said a friend of the doctor's had recounted meeting him in Günzburg during this time. The friend, Julius Diesbach, who has since died, said Dr. Mengele was using his own name and working for the Mengele company, according to Mr. Posner.

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